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Edgls of the Year.

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IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

*"Gather a shell from the strown beach,
And listen at its lips: they sigh
The same desire and mystery,
The echo of the whole sea's speech."*

Idyls
of
The Year.

JAMES PHINNEY BAXTER.

*Presented to the Library of the
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HOYT, FOGG, AND DONHAM.

1884.

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University Press :
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE.

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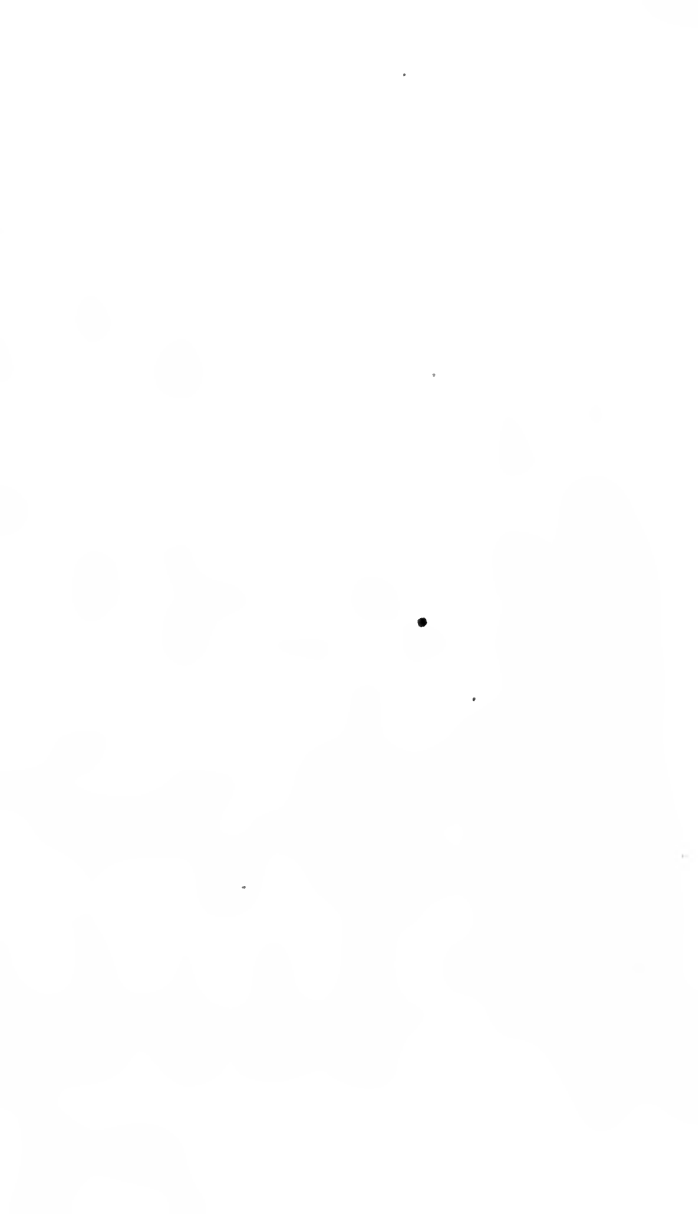
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IDYLS OF THE YEAR.







IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

FLOOD.

OUT from the east, O sea !
Dawn's kisses still aglow
Upon thy breasts of snow,
Thou flowest unto me.

The echo of a song,
Whose meaning hearts translate
To suit each fleeting state,
Thy billows bear along.

To one a dirge it seems,
Leaving a trace of pain ;
To one a sweet refrain,
Bringing elysian dreams.

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

But unto me, O sea !
Thy song majestic swells
With triumph which foretells
Things glorious to be.

For all my buoyant hopes
Are ships, with every thread
Of snowy canvas spread, —
Slant masts, and straining ropes.

They come, — a gallant fleet,
Bound home from Orient ports,
Laden with richest sorts
Of merchandise, I weet.

No spoil of land nor sea,
Nor handiwork of art
Treasured in costliest mart,
But hither comes to me,

Borne upon ideal ships
With sails more light than air,
And pennons passing fair,
Unkissed by zephyr's lips.

Richer than sceptred king,
All things are made for me,
On land, in air and sea ! —
I can but sing.

MARCH.

A HUNTSMAN, keen of sense and brain,
Reins his rough steed upon the plain,
And scans the sunless wastes again.
The bitter blasts beat all in vain ;
He heeds them not, but eye and ear
Strains as to catch in earth or sky
A glimpse of something drawing nigh,
Or haply some familiar cry,
Amid the chaos drear.

No joy is under heaven, for bare
Is earth of beauty everywhere ;
A thousand pools in fields once fair
Freeze in the sun, and earth and air
The wail of wandering streams repeat.
No harbinger of Spring is near,
Save when the sea-birds' voices drear
Float earthward, as they ever steer
Northward on pinions fleet.



THE FLIGHT NORTH.

WHEN the huntsman March, off flinging
With free hand the storm-wind's jesses,
Frowns the whipster Spring off, bringing
Summer's breath upon his tresses,
Swayed as by some strange delusion,
Rise the flocks in mad confusion, —

Rise from bayous and savannas,
Fens and marshes, where unbending
Cypresses their dismal banners
Wave through mazes never ending,
And to northlands waste and dreary
Sweep on wings which never weary, —

Sweep on wings of fury, driving
On through measureless expanses, —
'Gainst the shrieking tempest striving,

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

'Gainst the storm's bewildering lances ;
All the welkin with their thrilling,
Melancholy voices filling, —

Sweep on wings resistless, keeping
But in view their peerless leaders ;
Sweep o'er town and hamlet sleeping,
Leagues of moaning pines and cedars ;
Sweep through starry realms and regions
Desolate, in ghostly legions, —

Sweep to those dim shores deserted,
Ope to prying eyesight never,
Where with purpose undiverted
The shuddering needle points forever,
And above their beaches haunted
Cynosura hangs enchanted.

Welcome, plumèd hosts ! A greeting
To you all, O boisterous comers !
All your windy wings are beating
Symphonies which tell of Summer's
Swelling streams beneath the swinging
Willows ever softly singing.

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

Aye, ye harbinger sweet Summer's
Untold blisses ; and a greeting
Waft I unto you, O comers
From the southlands, ever beating
With wide wings the dim expanses,
Like a dreamer's shadowy fancies, —

Fancies urged with aspiration
For some fairer good, some distant
Eden hid from observation,
Whither evermore persistent
Strive they winged of strong endeavor,
Strive unsatisfied forever.

APRIL.

WITH shambling gait and vacant smile
Of mingled innocence and guile,
A loutish ploughboy climbs the stile,
Whistling a dubious tune the while,
And lingers by the sluggish pool,
Where, safe behind their rushy screen,
The nimble frogs in jackets green
Dodge the stone shied with awkward mien,
And jeer exultant, "Fool!"

On airy hills he hears the bleat
Of fleecy flocks ; and, softly sweet,
In vales where shade and sunlight meet,
The robins each new-comer greet ;
And, as one hoodwinked, here and there
With e'er uncertain feet he strays,
By sunny homes and gloomy ways,
And laughs and weeps with every phase
The changeful scene may wear.

SPRING.

WHILE from the pearly ports of morn
The gales with odorous secrets crept,
And, whispering of southland blisses,
In vernal valleys wept,
Pampered with Beauty's kisses, —
A bright-eyed wayward thing,
Wanting but elfish wing
To leave the world forlorn, —
Lo, Life passed as an infant Eden-born,
Tripping it laughingly through budding bowers,
And from a golden horn
Scattering on Pleasure's pathway fairest flowers,
Carolling fleetly,
Blithesomely, sweetly :
"Time is to Pleasure
A charmed cup of joy ;
Duty would measure
But to destroy."



MAY.

FROM a green osier in the sun
Tossing bright bubbles one by one,
She sees with glee her gay worlds, spun
From vapory light, their cycles run.
Her flute-like laughter all the day
With witchery fills the balmy air,
Which toying with her sunny hair
Weaves many a flossy toil and snare
For loiterers by the way.

In meadows veiled with misty light
She hears the herd-bells with delight,
And the mad mirth of brooks which smite
The lagging wheels to swifter flight ;
While the lark, lost to earthly gaze,
With music fills the heavenly leas,
Luring her thoughts to haunts of ease,
Where isles of pearl on azure seas
Float in a dreamy maze.

CRESCENDO.

FROM sunlit wastes of tropic seas,
With misty sails which catch the breeze
In sheeny splendor, comes the Spring,
Rapt in prophetic dreams
Of coming marvels, whose foregleams
Invade her magic ring.

Through Nature's silent sorrow breaks
An inspiration that awakes
The broods of joy, which all the day
Trill of the bliss to be ;
While Winter's mystery silently
Trails its white robes away.

Then, through the fringes of the rain,
Sun-smitten into life again
Loom the lost hills ; and all the streams,
With gossip brimming o'er,
Arouse the drowsy woods once more
From their enchanted dreams.

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

And ever drift the clouds from view,
And gather skies a deeper blue ;
And breathing still of fairer days
The breezes softly blow,
Setting the torching buds aglow
Along the leafy ways.

Ah, happy days, wherein all things—
The tree that buds, and rill that sings —
Are voiced with prophecies so sweet
That thought is fain to run
Beyond the bounds of sense and sun
The coming bliss to greet !

JUNE.

WHERE drowsy willows nod and sigh,
An angler by a brook doth lie ;
Upon his hook a painted fly,
A dream's soft shadow in his eye :
Thus like a charmèd prince he seems
Destined a glorious prize to win,
Which, like a jewelled javelin,
Poised as in air on quivering fin,
Before his vision gleams.

With purest blue the blissful sky
Pavilions him right royally.
Sometimes an oriole flames on high,
Or bee impetuous sparkles by,
Or bobolink ecstatic flings
Bubbles of music on the air :
And so he gathers everywhere
All sparkling joys together there,
Like pearls on silken strings.



DOLCE FAR NIENTE.

THE day o'erbrims with splendor like a rose ;
No hint of storm is in the far-off sky ;
I watch the blue sea as it comes and goes
Beneath my eye.

Toward the mirroring waters slowly dips
The broad-winged gull, and, rising, seaward glides ;
Toward the city toil the laboring ships
On favoring tides.

There comes to me the tumult of the keys,
The murmur of the marts, and scents which bear
Me into zones where every passing breeze
Is a sweet snare, —

A lure to languor. Ah, but what of this !
I must the sweet spell shatter, and away ;
And midst the mart's moil, where gray Duty is,
Wear out the day :

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

For Duty saith, "Life is too real a thing
To waste in worthless ways. For bread men
moan,
For soul and body, bread. 'T were shame to
bring
Them but a stone."

I glance down shamefaced-wise. "'Tis true,"
I sigh;
Then goldenly the sun gilds dome and spire,
And then an oriole goes sparkling by, —
A wingèd fire, —

And a fair city of a long dead day
Beameth before me, and the gleam of gear, —
Broad shield, and billowy plume, and bannerel
gay,
And lissome spear,

Leashed hound and hooded hawk, and rare-robed
dames,
And knights who curb tall steeds; and to my ear
"Sir Launcelot! Sir Galahad!" — glorious
names —
The soft winds bear.

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

And the sound stirs my soul as doth the air
A slumbering lyre ; and, come whatever may,
Am I lost to the world and all its care
For one brief day ;

And gathering glory in the tourney field
Will I forget my time, and be as one
Who weareth mail, and beareth lance and shield
Till set of sun,

And winneth glance of damosels whose lips,
As they would fain be kissed, smile down on him :
For thoughts skim silent centuries, as swift ships
The ocean's skim.

So will I have one joyous holiday,
Despite of men and marts and merchandise, —
A little tide in pleasant fields to stray,
'Neath cloudless skies.

JULY.

SHE comes from sunlands all aglow,
A gipsy queen with torrid brow
And swarthy locks, which to and fro,
Like roving clouds, the hot winds blow.
Along the dusty lane she strays,
Where sunflowers flaunt their garish charms,
And locusts pipe their shrill alarms,
While wandering passions e'er in arms
Meet in her ardent gaze.

Beneath the splendor of her eye
Their fragrant toil the scythemen ply ;
Yoked in the shade the oxen lie,
And burdened bees go droning by :
But memories swift each other chase
With passionate tumult through her brain,
And, fusing into one fierce pain,
Burst forth in tears like wasting rain
To mar her lavish grace.

SUMMER.

THE ruddy sun was on his azure throne ;
The gales had wandered to a bourn unknown,
Leaving no sound except the tedious drone
Of bees to fill the ear.

There was no thing so clear
But that it grew indefinite and far ;
The woody hills, — to eager vision, bar, —
Seemed into golden haze to melt away,
And the plains sleeping near
Seemed even doomed as they, —
Conjuring fantasies of yellow sands
And shrunken runlets, where the desert-bands
Sink down, and for relief in madness pray.
Then Life went by as one —
A youth of strong desire,
Whose spirit would aspire
To find a thing unknown —
Seeking forever, through the world so wide,

Ever unsatisfied,
Murmuring slowly,
With voice melancholy :
“ Pleasure, ah, linger ;
Heed not, I pray,
Duty’s stern finger
Warning away.”

AUGUST.

FROM Afric's shores a waif unknown,
On the hot sea-beach lying prone —
Snared in a dream — he seems as one
By scorching whirlwinds hither blown.
Over him glare bewildering skies,
Seethed in the fogs of hidden bays,
Whence, ever in mysterious ways,
Great ships from lurid shrouds of haze
Like ghosts a-sudden rise.

Within his dream's warm zone, again
The wonders of Sahara reign,
Where blazing sun and fiery plain
Devour the patient camel-train,
And simooms wave their glowing wings
Along the horizon's shores of light,
Like red flamingoes taking flight
To some oasis of delight
Watered by lucent springs.

THE HERD-BELLS.

WHEN faint and far the evening star
Through vapory veils is softly burning,
From pastures sweet, with noiseless feet
The tardy cows are home returning ;
While all their bells melodious swing together,
In concord with the blissful summer weather.

Ah, no less clear doth memory hear
Across the withered years their tinkle,
Where youth's bright rose no longer glows,
And fairest things bear stain and wrinkle ;
Still, still they blend their sweetest notes together,
Accordant with that far-off summer weather.

Oh, blessed eves, when through the leaves
Sifted the moons their silver treasures ;
With nought to jar, from earth to star,
On Nature's perfect rhythmic measures !

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

How softly then the herd-bells chimed together !
How endless seemed the cloudless summer
weather !

How calm and gray the broad fields lay,
And orchard lawns with shadows haunted !
Aye, ear could tell where softly fell
A purple plum through glooms enchanted ;
While in the dusky silence throbbed together
The tuneful bells in that still summer weather.

And near and far a wingèd star
Flickered athwart the level meadows ;
And weirdly beat their cymbals sweet
The locusts in the thickening shadows ;
While in the farmyard swung in tune together
The sweet bells in the balmy summer weather.

Ah, yes, how clear doth memory hear,
Blown o'er the chill wan years, their tinkle,
When age's snows hide youth's warm rose,
And all things dear bear stain and wrinkle ! —
Ah, yes, with silver tongues they sing together
Of all the bliss of that far summer weather.

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

And to our ears in heavenly spheres
Shall these sweet sounds for sweeter perish?
May bells ring there 'mid scenes more fair
Than these which we so fondly cherish, —
Wherein the silvery herd-bells chimed together,
In concert with the blissful summer weather?

SEPTEMBER.

SHE sits beneath her vine-wreathed eaves
Shrined like a saint, and ever weaves
A fantasy of glowing leaves
And flowers and fruits and gleaming sheaves ;
And looking out from calmest eyes
With a Madonna's pensive air,
Matronly-wise through coming care,
She seems a peaceful charm to bear
From teeming Paradise.

With mystery of change opprest,
She scans at times the dreamy west,
Where golden floods the reapers breast,
And bobolinks with sombre crest
And altered note their clans array ;
Blending her soft sighs with the coo
Of sorrowing doves, to find no clew
To secrets which like sparkling dew
Hide from the fairest day.



AUTUMN.

THE day was passing like a hunter hale
A-west, with night upon its trail ;
The bay was teeming with unnumbered sails
Swelling with homeward gales ;
And from the shores which inland lifted,
The sounds of rustling grain
And odors of a bounteous fruitage drifted
Out on the darkening main.
Then Life appeared in affluence, proudly sweeping
Through kingly thoroughfares, —
Within his heart's closed coffers fondly keeping
A worshipped wealth, — the sum of gilded cares, —
Mournfully sighing,
Yet conscience denying :
“ Duty would surely
Scourge to the right,
Could we securely
Heed not its might.”



OCTOBER.

WITH blanket gay and painted face,
Where glowers the pride of all his race,
Barbaric in his gauds and lace,
But with an air of sombre grace,
He haunts the flaming hills, to meet
The morning, — from his wigwam bright
Of wind-blown clouds come forth to smite
The lurking shadows of the night
With arrows keen and fleet.

Sometimes from clouds of brightest dye
A spire's gold cross transforms the sky ;
A silent eagle swings on high,
Or forth a red fox ventures shy ;
While from the lake's soft mist and gloom,
Like a mysterious voice to warn,
The loon's sad laughter thrills the morn,
Leaving within his heart forlorn
The chill of coming doom.



MISERERE.

THE cheerless sun hangs low ; the harsh north
wind
Blows with a bitter breath from off the sea ;
Brown are the southern slopes, where lately
dinned
The gauzy locust and the golden bee.

The idle fishers as they seaward gaze
Dream of the silvery spoil their nets have
won,
And fondly revel in the vanished days, —
Fairer than when their glowing course was run.

Their mazy nets drift useless on the gale ;
Their boats along the barren shore are strown ;
And but the billows' never-ending wail
Beats on the ear in dreary monotone.

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

Gone are the ships which bore in Summer's
prime

The wealth of prosperous ports : a single sail
Flits on the sea's dim verge a little time,
Then fades and is forgot like some fair tale,

And all is vacancy, — save when, maybe,
A sea-bird hurrying through the falling night,
In from the sterile pastures of the sea,
Sweeps silent as a shadow 'thwart the sight.

O fruitless earth ! O empty sky and sea !
O wailing waves ! O chill and bitter blast !
Where shall the doubting soul for comfort flee
Till all this dreariness be overpast ?

NOVEMBER.

C LASPING his gains, whate'er betides,
With shrill laconic speech he chides
The failing light, and grimly bides
The gloom which o'er the welkin glides.
No joy can stir his sluggish veins ;
Yet, as to catch some blissful boon —
A scent, a taste, a sight, a tune —
Of long-lost Summer, one sweet rune,
Each torpid sense he strains.

But the wild sea-fowl's wistful cry
For sunnier shores drifts sadly by ;
Scentless the globes of clover lie,
And fruitless trees against the sky
Stand stark and stiff ; while everywhere
Stalks a pale mystery, strangely still,
From realms of air, whose presence chill
Sends to his churlish heart a thrill,
And stills each passion there.



DECRESCENDO.

THERE is no splendor on the shadowy hills ;
Their gauds of gold the woods no longer
wear ;

A dreamy haze the empty welkin fills,
And reigns a strange sad silence everywhere,

Save for the lonely bittern's wistful cry,
From foodless marshes floating drearily,
Or plover's fitful plaint borne shrilly by,
Or wail of waves blown from the far-off sea.

On yon bleak slope, by slowly freezing springs,
The sluggish geese, by sudden instinct fired,
Wave wide with clamorous cries their windy
wings,
As if to sunnier realms they fain aspired.

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

And in the pasture, comfortless and bare,
Where shelter scant the shuddering birches yield,
Pathetic in their patience, dumbly stare
The huddling sheep across the snow-flecked field.

Where erewhile lisped the willow all the day
In sweetest mystery to the impassioned stream,
A shivering skeleton stands stark and gray,
The phantom of a once delicious dream.

And listless drops the ash its beads of red
From shrivelled fingers slowly, one by one ;
As if the final orison were said
For all the beauty which from earth has gone.

Whither, ah, whither hath the Summer flown
With all its wondrous witchery, all its bliss,
Its roses' breath, its fields with beauty sown,
Its sweet-voiced birds, its zephyr's balmy kiss,

Its whispering woods, its softly psalming rills,
Its clouds of pearl, its heaven's immeasured blue,
The far-off splendor of its lucent hills,
Its meadows lush with morn's enquickening dew ?

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

Whither, ah, whither? There is no reply :
The streams are tongueless, and the woods are
dumb ;

An unsolved riddle is the chill, gray sky,
And from wan hills no cheering sign may come.

Faith, following far, alone may garner hope
From sunless fields, unfruitful and forlorn ;
Alone may cast a certain horoscope,
And bathe in sunshine of a day unborn ; —

May look beyond the dim, uncertain hills
Where Winter's ghostly garments faintly gleam,
Discerning clearly through impending ills
A Summer all of beauty brightly beam.

DECEMBER.

SHE cometh like a pale surprise
From the still cloisters of the skies,
A mystic faith within her eyes ;
And at lone shrines she sadly plies
Her chilly beads with fingers thin ;
While, like the dews from upper calms,
To her rapt soul come voiceless psalms,
Transforming with resistless charms
The sorrows borne within.

The heavens bring near their fields of gray,
Where walks the moon's pale wraith by day,
While crows flit patiently away
To foodless fields in mute array, —
Chill fields, where listless willows bide
By shrouded ponds ; for all things wear
A waiting look in earth and air, —
A faith in something yet to bear
Redemption far and wide.

WINTER.

AND, lo, Life once again,
As one from dross purged by affliction's
flames

Who long had toiled in pain
Upon the rugged ways experience claims !
Wisdom was emblemed by his snowy hair,
Stirred by the viewless air
And glistening in the moonbeams as the sheet
Shrouding the passing year.
A tomb was at his feet,
Yet smilingly he looked toward the skies,
And whispered as to some white-winged surprise
Flashing through vapor
Of sense like a taper :
“ Duty is surely
Love's other name ;
Reading them purely,
Both are the same.”

JANUARY.

A FAIR child by a glimmering sea
Scanning the mute east wistfully,
To catch a glimpse of sails blown free
From wonder-ports, — such sails, maybe,
As flit in dreams from ports of air, —
A child of elfish mien and shy,
Athwart the sheen of whose clear eye
Oft light-winged visions softly fly,
Leaving a glory there.

The sea is dumb, the woods are still ;
No fragrance steals from plain nor hill ;
From far-off isles, so white and chill,
Of happy change no voices trill ;
To him the universe is given,
An ivory casket locked and sealed,
Which to no key of sense may yield,
But wherein pearls, like hopes congealed,
Garner the tints of heaven.

THE ALCHEMIST.

THE wrack drifts up the midnight sky,
And veils the filmy stars from sight ;
The winds through budless branches sigh,
Where whippoorwills beguiled the night.

A cheerless end thou hast, Old Year, —
O swiftly passing Year !

Bent as a crosier is his form,
His wind-blown locks are thin and white ;
O'er embers erewhile red and warm
A crucible he clutches tight.

Our wealth we cast therein, Old Year, —
Our golden hopes, Old Year !

Unto his crucible we brought
An argosy of cherished pelf ;
Such things as strong Ambition wrought,
The gauds of pride, the love of self.

We gave thee all our wealth, Old Year, —
Our dearest wealth, Old Year !

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

From these we fondly hoped to gain,
Transmuted by his cunning arts,
A jewel men have sought in vain
By land and sea in royal marts.

Our treasures turned to dross, Old Year, —
To worthless dross, Old Year !

He gave us visions of lands and gold,
Visions of triumph and of power,
A thousand pictures of joys untold
To brighten life's too fleeting hour.

They were but phantoms, alas, Old Year, —
But idle dreams, Old Year !

Good sooth, a winsome wight was he,
His face was fair to look upon ;
His eye was bright, his glance was free,
From all the world good-will he won.

A noble friend thou wert, Old Year, —
A flattering friend, Old Year !

But now he sits forlorn and pale,
Like one whom many dreams enthrall,
Nor heeds the sighing of the gale

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

Nor shadows' ever thickening fall.

Thy labor 's done at last, Old Year, —

Thy weighty task, Old Year !

Over his crucible bends he still,

Above the faded brands he bends ;

But, lo ! across the silent hill

With glowing cheek one hither wends.

All hail ! All hail ! O blithe New Year !

O happy, fair New Year !

All hail ! All hail ! There shall be brought

To thy alembic offerings new :

Such things as duty well has wrought, —

Meekness and love, those jewels true.

To thee shall all be brought, New Year, —

Our soul's best wealth, New Year !

Then welcome, flattering Year ! In dreams

We kiss thy garments' broidered hem ;

For in thy bright alembic beams

Even Happiness, that long-sought gem,

The meed of Duty, bright New Year,

Which all may win, New Year !

FEBRUARY.

WITH dainty step she softly goes
Her beaming lattice to uncloze,
And sighs towards the south which glows
With faintest amethyst and rose ;
There lies the ideal land of calm,
Whither her longing thoughts take wing,
But only to return and bring
Sweet promises, like birds of Spring,
From meadows breathing balm.

She hears awakening Nature greet
The morn, which comes with welcome feet
O'er snow-wreathed hills, while voices sweet
Of wind-blown bells their joy repeat ;
And, touched with hope, " Ah, soon," she cries,
" The quickening voices of the rills
Shall rouse to life the cheerless hills,
And bloomless fields, and slumbering mills,
With songs of Paradise."





E B B.

I STAND at sunset watching
The ebbing of the sea,
Hooded in sorrow, telling
The beads of memory.

White wings in the distance flutter
And disappear from sight ;
A wreck's lank ribs, like spectres,
On the beach stand stark and white.

They move ! Nay, 't is the seaweed
Just stirred by the evening wind,
With which each slimy timber
Is loathsomely entwined.

Ah, where are the shapes of beauty
That once entranced my soul,
That sped with favoring breezes
Toward their promised goal?

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

I strain my vision seaward —
I see but a misty plain ;
And into the heavens above me
I peer, but all in vain.

I stretch my arms in silence —
I clasp but senseless air ;
I shout and get no answer,
Though I die in my despair.

I list the soft sweet rustle
Of their silken sails to hear ;
They are somewhere, surely somewhere,
In this universal sphere.

But never a sound comes to me,
But the moan of the sea on the shore ;
I have learned its utterance plainly,
“No more — no more — no more.”

Ah, where are the shapes of beauty
Which once entranced my soul,
Which sped with favoring breezes
Toward their promised goal?

IDYLS OF THE YEAR.

Shattered on reefs of coral, —
Ah, treacherous reefs, so fair ! —
Scattered on lonely beaches,
And ledges sharp and bare ;

Foundered in wastes unsounded,
Burnt on some unknown sea, —
They are gone with all their treasures,
Forever lost to me.

















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